

Preservations Partners Task Force

Meeting Summary

11 July 2006

1. Call to Order: 7:35 PM

Members Present: Ron Anzalone, Pete Behr, Nikki Graves, Laurence Pence, Cathy Taylor, and Kevin Lee Sarring.
Staff Present: Debra Gee

Chair Behr announced that the City Council had extended the duration of the Task Force through 31 December 2007 in order to complete its work.

2. Discussion of Recommendations to City Council

After considerable discussion and editing, voted by a show of hands to adopt the attached recommendations to the City Council.

3. Discussion/Decision on Whether to Provide Comments on City Center

After reviewing a draft recommendation from the Historical Commission to the City Council, voted by a show of hands to support in principal the Historical Commission's draft memorandum of 9 July 2006.

Chair Behr agreed to prepare a memorandum to the City Council with the Task Force's comments on the City Center.

4. Next Steps

Chair Behr distributed a memorandum dated 11 July 2006 with issues to be determined. Issues included:

What level of preservation action would apply to Landmark and Contributing properties?

What specific 'loophole closing' actions would the Task Force recommend?

Would the Task Force have a community outreach program this fall? If yes, what would be its goals?

What incentives would the Task Force recommend for owners of Landmark properties who agree to preservation elements?

Discussion was offered on which community groups to meet with and to present the Task Force's recommendations. At its next meeting, the Task Force will discuss how to target its presentations to various groups.

The memorandum of 11 July 2006 also contained four proposals, as follows:

That an owner of a Landmark property or a Contributing property within an Historic District would be required to obtain approval by HARB for any major addition, and that HARB would grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for designs that complied with Design Guidelines incorporated in the new Historic Preservation program.

Loopholes, as examples cited in the staff report of July 2005: Staff would have authority to make quick reviews and decisions in emergency situations; HARB could issue standards for applications; In the case of owners seeking to raze a protected property, the owner's 'reasonable return' would be defined based on the property's existing zoning, owners would be required to make a 'good faith' effort to sell their property before proceeding to razing, the appeal process should be clarified; and the rules governing relocation of historic structures would be clarified.

Members of the Task Force would meet with relevant community organizations after Labor Day to explain its proposals; Task Force members would work with the Historical Commission and VPIS and City staff to hold workshops in neighborhoods that are candidates for becoming Historic Districts; and the Task Force would develop website information about the City's historic preservation policies and the City's historic heritage.

The City of Falls Church would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust in which Landmark property owners could choose to grant conservation easements to the Trust, thus qualifying for state and federal income tax reductions. The Trust charges a one-time fee of \$5,000 to maintain the property's perpetual eligibility for tax relief. It would also charge several thousand dollars to investigate and process an application. The City staff and the Historical Commission would assist the Trust in presenting the option to the owner.

Discussion was offered on the four proposals. Potential community groups with which to meet included VPIS, Tinner Hill Foundation, Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Cherry Hill, and the Victorian Society at Falls Church. The proposal to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust drew considerable discussion concerning other organizations to hold an easement, which property owners might qualify for incentives, and who should pay fees associated with the easements. No decisions were reached on this proposal.

Ron Anzalone agreed to provide Chair Behr with copies of the Historical Commission's memorandum on the City Center and with a copy of the draft recommendations, as revised by the Task Force.

Debra Gee distributed information from the APVA Preservation Alliance concerning Governor Kane's proposed amendments to Land Conservation Tax Credit legislation.

4. **Approval of Meeting Summary of 20 June 2006**

Meeting Summary approved by voice vote.

5. **Determine Next Meeting Date**

The Task Force scheduled its next meeting for Tuesday, 25 July 2006.

6. **Adjourn: 9:50 PM.**

Attachment

**PRESERVATION PARTNERS TASK FORCE
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE
CITY COUNCIL**

1. Historic Districts
 - a. The Council would establish a new program to create separate Historic Districts within the city in order to “preserve and enhance historic structures within the residential districts of the City” and “enhance the character, quality, diversity, livability, and identity of the community”. Districts would be based on subdivisions or neighborhoods with a concentration of historically significant properties and reflect National Register of Historic Places criteria. Such criteria would be added to the revised historic preservation ordinance.
 - b. Property owners, residents, or community organizations working with the Falls Church Historical Commission, or the Commission on its own volition, could initiate the process for creating an Historic District based upon neighborhoods or subdivisions. This process would include boundaries recommendations and necessary research (including a field survey, as relevant) to identify and describe ‘contributing’ and ‘non-contributing’ historic properties within a proposed District. Upon receiving or initiating a proposal, the Commission, supported by the City staff, would arrange for a public session on the proposal and consider and recommend appropriate action, including advising the Council on the proposal’s merits.
 - c. Citizens would be encouraged to form historic district associations to advise and assist the Commission and City staff in identifying proposed districts.
 - d. The Council will consider the views of all affected property owners and the historic significance of the area in determining whether to create a District.
 - e. The historic preservation ordinance would be amended to define policies for protecting contributing properties. Properties currently on the City’s Official Register of Historic Structures would remain covered by the ordinance whether or not they were included in a Historic District.
2. Landmarks. A new category of protected places, Landmark properties, would be created and would receive the highest level of review and protection.
 - a. Property owners, residents, or community organizations working with the Historical Commission, or the commission on its own volition, could nominate a property for Landmark status. Applications would be reviewed by the Commission and City staff and, if they meet with criteria established in the ordinance, would be recommended to the Council for designation as Landmarks.
 - b. The Commission and the City staff would assist Landmark owners in applying for inclusion in the State and National Registers, and in preparing any necessary documentation for State or Federal tax benefits.

- c. In addition to income tax benefits that may be available to owners of properties on the National and State registers, Landmark property owners would be eligible for local property tax incentive under a new program created by the Council. City staff would investigate and report on ways to provide tax relief through conservation easements. Tax relief might be available to Landmark property owners who grant easements that protect their properties' historic value in perpetuity.
- 3. Historic Preservation Ordinance. The Council would address 'loophole' issues in the historic preservation ordinance, including those identified by the HARB and listed in the July 2005 staff report to Council.
- 4. Historic Preservation Function. The Council would establish a separate historic preservation function within the City administration, adequately staffed and funded, to carry out the objectives of the historic preservation ordinance, including annual property review updates, complete necessary revision of the new historic preservation ordinance, establish an ongoing program to identify and register historic properties and nominate those properties to the National Register of Historic Places, prepare a community-wide historic preservation plan that includes planning, protection, and ongoing education programs, determine community interest in becoming a Certified Local Government to assist in carrying out the historic preservation program outlined above; and provide staff support for the HARB and Historical Commission.
- 5. Public Education and Outreach. By December 31, 2006, the Preservation Partners Task Force would propose specific modifications to the history property review process for current Official Register Structures, Historic Districts, and Landmarks. The Task Force would also take this opportunity to create and initiate a public education and outreach program on the historic preservation program. Such community action would be bolstered by outside technical and contract assistance (available through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources or other means).